

Today the Department of Education is releasing a report which also shows we're doing a better job as a country in detecting guns in the schools. That's really good—that's the good news. The bad news is there are a lot of guns in the schools and other weapons. In 1997 more than 6,000 students were expelled for bringing firearms to school. But I think that means we must continue and bear down on this policy of zero tolerance for guns in our schools.

And again, it works to prevent problems. The superintendent of the Alexandria, Virginia, schools—which, by the way, is now the most diverse school district in America; Fairfax County has kids from 180 different racial and ethnic groups, speaking over 100 native languages. But because they have a rigorous zero tolerance program, they have cut suspendable offenses over the past couple of years by more than 40 percent. It works. And we can have those results all over the country.

But let me say, going back to an issue you're debating, Secretary Riley asked all these school security experts what they thought we could do as a people, not just the Federal Government, to make the schools safer. And they said, interestingly enough, one of the most important things we could do is to create the smallest possible classes in the early grades, because the kids with problems would be found by the teachers. And then the teachers and the families and the counselors could work together to try to prevent these kids from getting in trouble in the first place. I thought it was a stunning thing, amazing.

So Delaware is leading the Nation, and the Nation must follow. And we must, Republicans and Democrats together, all Americans, make a commitment to a revolution in standards and accountability, in choice and safety, based on high expectations, accountability, and performance. It will take all of our commitment to do the job, but the challenge must be met because America can't become what it ought to be if we don't.

We can do this. This is not rocket science. This is an affair of the mind which most of us can comprehend. Fundamentally, it is also an affair of the heart. We know—we know—that the best days of this country are still

ahead. You may be the oldest State, but you still want to have the longest future. And the only way we can do it is with this.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. in the Senate Chamber. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tom Carper and Lt. Gov. Ruth Ann Minner of Delaware; President Pro Tempore Thomas B. Sharp, Delaware State Senate; Speaker Terry R. Spence, Delaware State House of Representatives; former Governors Russell W. Peterson and Sherman W. Tribbitt of Delaware; Mayor James L. Hutchinson of Dover; and Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina.

### **Message to the Congress Transmitting the Proposed "Class- Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Act of 1998"**

*May 8, 1998*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

I am pleased to transmit today for your immediate consideration and enactment the "Class-Size Reduction and Teacher Quality Act of 1998." This legislative proposal would help States and local school districts recruit, train, and hire 100,000 additional well-prepared teachers in order to reduce the average class size to 18 in grades 1 through 3 in our Nation's public schools. It is an essential part of our overall effort to strengthen public schools throughout the Nation.

As schools across the Nation struggle to accommodate a surge in enrollments, educators and parents have become increasingly concerned about the impact of class size on teaching and learning, particularly in the critically important early grades, where students learn reading and other basic skills. This concern is justified: rigorous research confirms what parents and teachers have long believed—that students in smaller classes, especially in the early grades, make greater educational gains and maintain those gains over time. These gains occur because teachers in small classes can provide students with more individualized attention, spend more time on instruction and less time on discipline, and cover more material effectively. Moreover, the benefits of smaller classes are greatest for poor, minority, and inner-city

children, the children who often face the greatest challenges in meeting high educational standards.

Smaller classes will have the greatest impact on student learning if the new teachers brought into the classroom are well qualified to teach reading and to take advantage of smaller learning environments. For this reason, my proposal emphasizes not just class-size reduction but also professional development for educators, and it will give school districts adequate time to recruit and train staff while phasing in smaller classes. Furthermore, all new teachers hired under the program would be required to pass a State teacher competency test and would also have to be certified to teach or be making satisfactory progress toward full certification.

We can help all of our students learn to read independently and well by the third grade, get a solid foundation in basic skills, and reach high educational standards if we start them off with small classes and well-prepared teachers in the early grades.

Under my proposal, the Department of Education would provide \$20.8 billion in mandatory appropriations over a 10-year period (beginning with \$1.1 billion in fiscal year 1999) to States. The States would then distribute the funds to local school districts based on their relative class sizes in grades 1 through 3, as well as on their ability and effort to finance class-size reductions with their own resources. The bill would provide States with considerable flexibility in distributing these funds, while ensuring that the most needy school districts receive a fair share.

Moreover, because my proposal would actually appropriate the funds needed to carry out the program, States and local communities could count on these funds without the need for separate congressional appropriations each year. This proposal is fully paid for within my Fiscal Year 1999 Budget, and therefore would not reduce the budget surplus.

School districts would use these funds to reduce class sizes in grades 1 through 3. Just as importantly, these funds would also be available for a variety of activities to ensure that students in the early grades receive sound and effective instruction, such as mak-

ing sure that teachers know how to teach reading and other subjects effectively in small classes.

This proposal includes strong accountability for results. Participating school districts would produce "report cards" documenting reductions in class sizes and the achievement of their students in reading, based on rigorous assessments. Schools whose students fail to make gains in reading would be required to undertake corrective actions. In addition, the Department of Education would undertake a comprehensive national evaluation of this program and its impact on reading achievement and teaching.

I urge the Congress to take prompt and favorable action on this proposal. Its enactment would help school districts reduce class sizes in the early grades and improve instruction and achievement in reading, issues that are of major importance to parents and to the Nation.

**William J. Clinton**

The White House,  
May 8, 1998.

### **Remarks to the Community at Dover Air Force Base in Dover**

*May 8, 1998*

Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your wonderful remarks and your sterling leadership of the Department of Defense, to Governor Carper and Congressman Castle, Colonel Grieder, Colonel Keitel, Mayor Hutchinson, to the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley, who is here with me today, to all the members of the United States Air Force, their families, their friends, and thank you especially for bringing the children today. And I'd like to say a special word of thanks to the Dover High School Band for their welcome and their music. I don't know if the recruiting officer has been to see them, but they have sufficient enthusiasm to be in our military service. Great job.

I am delighted to be here, back at Dover Air Force Base, home of the 436th Military Airlift Wing and the 512th Reserve Wing, those of you who work around the clock to support and defend our freedom. I've already had a chance to be on the C-5 and speak